

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

The Philosophy

This session follows on from the 'Knowledge' session, but it works independently of that. It gets children to look at the nature of knowledge – where does it come from, and how can we distinguish it from belief or opinion, and what kind of things can we know about?

Like 'Tabby Is A Cat', use sentences on sheets of paper laid out on the floor. It is quite important in this session because the children get to physically move the sentences about. If you are not following on from the Knowledge session, you will need some kind of warm-up or stimulus. I would recommend using classic philosophical examples. Here is one that is adapted from Novick:

Stimulus 1

A boy supports [insert uncontroversial football team that will not distract the football fans]. They play [insert second uncontroversial football team]. He goes online after the match to check the scores. But he doesn't realise that he is looking at an old website. It tells him that his team won 3-0 so he's really pleased. But it's actually the score from the match played last season between the two teams, not today's match.

Task Question 1

- ✓ Does the boy know the score?

Probably most children will say 'No'. Assuming no child thinks of it themselves you can then tell them: Actually, the match today ended with exactly the same score as last season. The score was 3-0 today as well. So does the boy know the score?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ What do you need in order to know something?
- ✓ Is it enough to believe something that is true?
- ✓ What do you know?

Task Question 2

- ✓ Can you think of one thing that you definitely know?

[This is where the Knowledge session often ends so you would pick up here]

There are two ways to do this. One way is to write some of the children's answers on sheets of paper. Another is to prepare some examples of your own. And of course you can mix the two. Examples might be:

Dinosaurs are extinct.

2 + 2 = 4

Cheryl Cole is beautiful.

Pluto/The moon is a planet.

Unicorns have one horn.

People in Haiti [or Japan or wherever is topical] need help.

Yesterday was Wednesday.

The 2012 Olympics are in London.

Lay them in the middle of the floor. Then tell the students that they should move one to the left if they know it, and to the right if they don't. First they discuss in pairs which ones they'd like to move, where, and why. Then invite a child to move one. This is a good opportunity to pick out children who don't speak often. Then ask another child to move one. At this stage you can start asking if anyone disagrees with any of the two movements so far. And so you go on. Children can move things back if they disagree with the person who moved it – sometimes a sheet can travel a lot in the time! The aim is to try to get the whole class agreeing which sentences go in the 'know' group, and which sentences go in the 'don't know' group. It can go on for a while. In practice, a lot of the discussion will centre on whether something is true rather than whether we know it, but they do pick up on the reasons for being sceptical.